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Report on the implementation of UNCCD fellowship programme

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 25/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties (COP), recalling the consensus on the need to establish a UNCCD fellowship programme, and having considered the conclusions and recommendations in document ICCD/COP(11)/CST/8, welcomed the Partnership Agreement and Governance Manual for establishing the programme. By the same decision the COP requested the Executive Secretary to support the fellowship programme steering group to establish and launch the fellowship programme, invited the steering group to broaden the fellowship programme partnership, and invited Parties, organizations and the private sector to make contributions to support the fellowship programme.

This report details actions taken by the different stakeholders of the fellowship programme, presents the results of those actions, and provides some conclusions and a recommendation for consideration by Parties.

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I. Introduction

1. By its decision 25/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) welcomed the Partnership Agreement and Governance Manual (PAGM) for establishing the UNCCD fellowship programme (FP). Also by that decision the COP invited the fellowship programme steering group, Parties, the secretariat, other organizations and the private sector to take actions to support the realization of the objectives of the FP.

2. By paragraph 8 of decision 25/COP.11, the COP requested the secretariat to report at its twelfth session (COP 12) on the implementation of the FP as elaborated in the PAGM. The present document details actions taken by the different stakeholders of the FP and provides information on the difficulties encountered thus far. It also offers some conclusions and a recommendation for consideration by the Parties.

II. Support to the fellowship programme Steering Committee

3. The secretariat supported work on the establishment of FP through providing information and advice to the steering group also called Steering Committee (FPSC), functioning as the de facto secretary of the FPSC, and performing the role of institutional memory for the FPSC. It also provided practical support, through organizing and conducting meetings of the FPSC. Only four meetings had been held up to the time of reporting.

4. The secretariat found the task of organizing meetings of the FPSC very challenging due in part to the lack of resources for convening face-to-face meetings; meetings therefore had to be conducted by telephone conference. There was also the problem of achieving the quorum required by Article X of the PAGM.

III. Results of the work of the fellowship programme Steering Committee

5. At its meetings FPSC members agreed, inter alia:

(a) To take a number of measures to operationalize the FP, including formulating a concrete programme of action to be undertaken before COP 12, and a plan to broaden the partnership support for the FP;

(b) To accept two new members;

(c) To launch the FP at COP 12;

(d) To secure at least one offer of a fellowship before COP 12;

(e) To appoint a Chair of the FPSC;

(f) To request the secretariat to develop a web page for the FP, through its Capacity-Building Marketplace (CBM), and to arrange for the CBM internship programme to be integrated within the FP.

IV. Support for the operationalization of the fellowship programme

6. Through the efforts of the secretariat two additional institutions have become members of the FPSC. Discussions are ongoing with several other institutions to become members, and collaboration has been initiated with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for simultaneous promotion of each other's fellowship programmes.

7. The secretariat has designed a web page for the FP, to be hosted on the CBM, and has promoted the FP through lectures and other activities among postgraduate students at various universities.

8. The internship programme offered through the CBM has been enhanced to form part of the FP. These internships are offered only to postgraduate (Master's and above) students for between three and six months, and focus on delivering actual professional skills.

V. Support from Parties, organizations and the private sector

9. Decision 25/COP.11 invited Parties, organizations and the private sector to make contributions to support the FP. By September 2015 three learning institutions had indicated the possibility of collaborating with the FP, and there has been one expression of interest by the private sector to give support. However, no Party had expressed interest in contributing in any way to the FP. This lack of broad-based support certainly hinders the operation and operationalization of the FP.

VI. Evolution of the multi-stakeholder partnership governance model

10. The lack of resources and of a strong and effective support mechanism give rise to many difficulties, including for the administration of FP. The problems of communications, the lack of human and financial resources, the difficulties with organizing meetings of the FPSC, the need for more involvement of Parties, and the over-exhaustion of the secretariat's limited human resources in support of the FP, are clearly problems which hinder the operation of the multi-stakeholder partnership governance model.

11. Notwithstanding the challenges, it must be noted that by working with the multi-stakeholder partnership governance model, the FP has made some modest but serious achievements, as outlined above.

12. For the FP to be successful there must be commitment by all stakeholders, expressed through the provision of needed resources and the building and effective functioning of the necessary partnerships. The key to the success of the FP is clearly sustained serious involvement by Parties. For the period under review that support was not forthcoming.

VII. Conclusions and recommendation

A. Conclusions

13. From the evidence available it seems clear that the resources, both human and financial, necessary for the FP to be successful are difficult to come by.

14. The secretariat has no resources to adequately support the operationalization of the FP on its own. It is therefore forced to stretch its already very limited resources to service the programme.

15. The secretariat is already supporting many capacity building activities within the framework of the UNCCD process. It should be allowed to focus on strengthening and consolidating these efforts, rather than promoting another for which there are no resources.

16. Without serious commitment by Parties to support the building of the necessary partnership between relevant institutions, organizations and the private sector, operationalization of the FP will continue to be extremely difficult.

B. Recommendation

17. Bearing in mind the conclusions set out above, Parties at the twelfth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 12) may wish to advise the COP to discontinue the UNCCD fellowship programme.

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